

[Peter Odenwald]

W15466

(dup. of W15461 Conn. [1938-9?] P. Odenwald.

Peter Odenwald, 66, Clay Street, Thomaston:

"My brother Henry was tellin' me about you, only he said you was writin' up stuff on the clock shop. You want to know about the knife business, too? Oh, I see. Well, of course I ain't a knifemaker, you'll have to go see Charley Klocker or Jim Truelove or some of them fellas if you want to know the ins and outs of knifemakin', but I worked in the knife shops, different times. I worked in Waterville and I worked in Thomaston knife companies.

"I worked in Waterville about thirty five years altogether. Not in the knife business, though. Last job I had, year ago last December I got laid off, was in Waterville. Like I say, I never claimed to be a knifemaker though. I used to do odd jobs, like cleanin', and packin', and like that.

"Knifemakin' was a pretty good trade and it took you quite a while to break in on it. If you didn't have friends or relations in the business, you didn't stand much of a chance. They was good money in it, and of course they wanted to keep it among themselves mostly, those English people. Most all English people in the knife business, somehow or other. Charley Klocker was a German, like myself, but they wasn't many Germans in it. Charley's old man learned the business right in the old country and he was as good as any Englishman I ever saw. Why, he made some special knives, little watch charm knives and novelties like that, and some fella took them out 2 to an exposition in Chicago, and they sold like hotcakes. He wrote back to Charley's old man and told him to send all he could rake up, he'd sell 'em for him.

"They made good money, the knifemakers did. Spent it faster's they could make it, though. Funny, you comin' along this afternoon—I was just talkin' to Tod Waters about an old knifemaker from Northfield, used to come down here and get drunk. His name was Fred Russell. Maybe you remember him yourself. You don't? Well, like I say, they always had a pocketful of money when they started out on a spree. I seen this Fred Russell many a time with a roll big enough to choke a cow. He used to come down here to the Hash House and get roarin' drunk. Helpless. He drove a horse and wagon. Tod Waters was in there one night and Russell was there, and he got good and drunk. Got a cryin' jag on. He says to Tod Waters, 'take me hom, Tod.' Tod felt sorry for him, so he took him out and helped him into the back of the wagon, and got in the driver's seat and drove up to Russell's house in Northfield. But when he got there, he went around to help Russell out, and the old guy was gone. Tod drove all the way back to Thomaston, lookin' along the road, figgerin', he might have fell out, but he never see hide nor hair of him till he got back to the Hash House. There was Russell up to the bar havin' a drink, and cryin' again. Soon's he saw Tod he says, 'take me hom, Tod.' Tod says, 'I'll be damned if I will!' I often say that to Tod when I see him an the street, 'take me home, Tod,' I say. He always gets a laugh out of it.

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"Funny how that business went to hell, ain't it? Well, it ain't no worse than a lot of others, right now at that. I worked down in Waterville, Burbecker and Rowland's for a good many years. Then the Beardsley and Wolcotts got ahold of it and they went under, and then this company from Massachusetts took it—they kind of rented the place—and it was all right for a while—and then they moved back to Fairhaven. And I got laid off and I ain't worked since. I coulda gone up there to work, but what the hell, I was only gettin' a couple days a week, and it woulda cost me seventy five or eighty bucks to move and after I got there I probably woulda got laid off again and then where the hell would I be? So I got this unemployment insurance for thirteen weeks, and in the meantime I had an application in for the old age pension and the week after I got my last check, the pension started comin'. Of course it's only seven bucks a week, but I can get by on it, if I's careful. I wish I had a

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couple bucks more, and then it wouldn't be so close figgerin'. I don't want to be rich, I don't give a damn as long as I can get by. The only thing I's afraid of is some day they'll do away with it. But there ain't no use worryin' about it, is there? Take it as it comes and don't worry about what's gonna happen, that's the way I always figgered."